

JOINT DISTRIBUTION: TWO DECADES OF CHANGE

BY

COLONEL JAMES B. STANFORD
United States Army

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U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050

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JOINT DISTRIBUTION: TWO DECADES OF CHANGE

by

Colonel James B. Stanford
United States Army

Colonel James D. Scudieri
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

ABSTRACT

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The unforeseen requirements associated with sustaining U.S. forces in OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF), OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), and now OPERATION NEW DAWN, have triggered significant adaptations in joint distribution across all levels of war. While the events since 2001 highlight significant change in the logistics system, evolution of joint distribution traces back to 1989. The joint distribution community has affected change in the strategic through tactical levels of logistics, responding to a myriad of challenges presented by enemy action, distance, politics, and bureaucratic organization. The purpose of this paper is to describe the evolution of the joint distribution community and attempt to determine how the Department of Defense (DoD) developed the current model, and what the implications are for the future of distribution. The key factor is the evolution of joint distribution through the transformative partner relationships among the national distribution partners and United States Central Command (USCENTCOM).

JOINT DISTRIBUTION: TWO DECADES OF CHANGE

The unforeseen requirements associated with sustaining U.S. forces in OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF), OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), and now OPERATION NEW DAWN (OND), have triggered significant adaptations in joint distribution across all levels of war. While the events since 2001 highlight significant change in the logistics system, the evolution of joint distribution traces back to 1989. The joint distribution community has affected change in the strategic through tactical levels of logistics, responding to a myriad of challenges presented by enemy action, distance, politics and bureaucratic organization. In 2010, the Joint Staff J4 attempted to codify the changes in the release of Joint Publication 4.09 *Distribution Operations*.¹ Indeed, figure 1, taken from JP 4.09, depicts a complex array of strategic, operational, and tactical distribution capabilities tied together in a single global distribution pipeline.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the evolution of the joint distribution community and attempt to determine how the Department of Defense (DoD) developed the current model, and what the implications are for the future of distribution. It will do so through the transformative partner relationships among the national distribution partners and a single Geographic Combatant Command (GCC), United States Central Command (USCENTCOM). The changes in joint distribution over the last two decades have not always been even or well integrated into a pre-conceived joint distribution construct. The changes have, however, always been in response to legitimate need. This paper will show that the national distribution partners drove the changes from resources provided at the strategic level of logistics. While strategic impetus is a key

change agent, the evolution of joint distribution also impacted the operational and tactical levels of war.

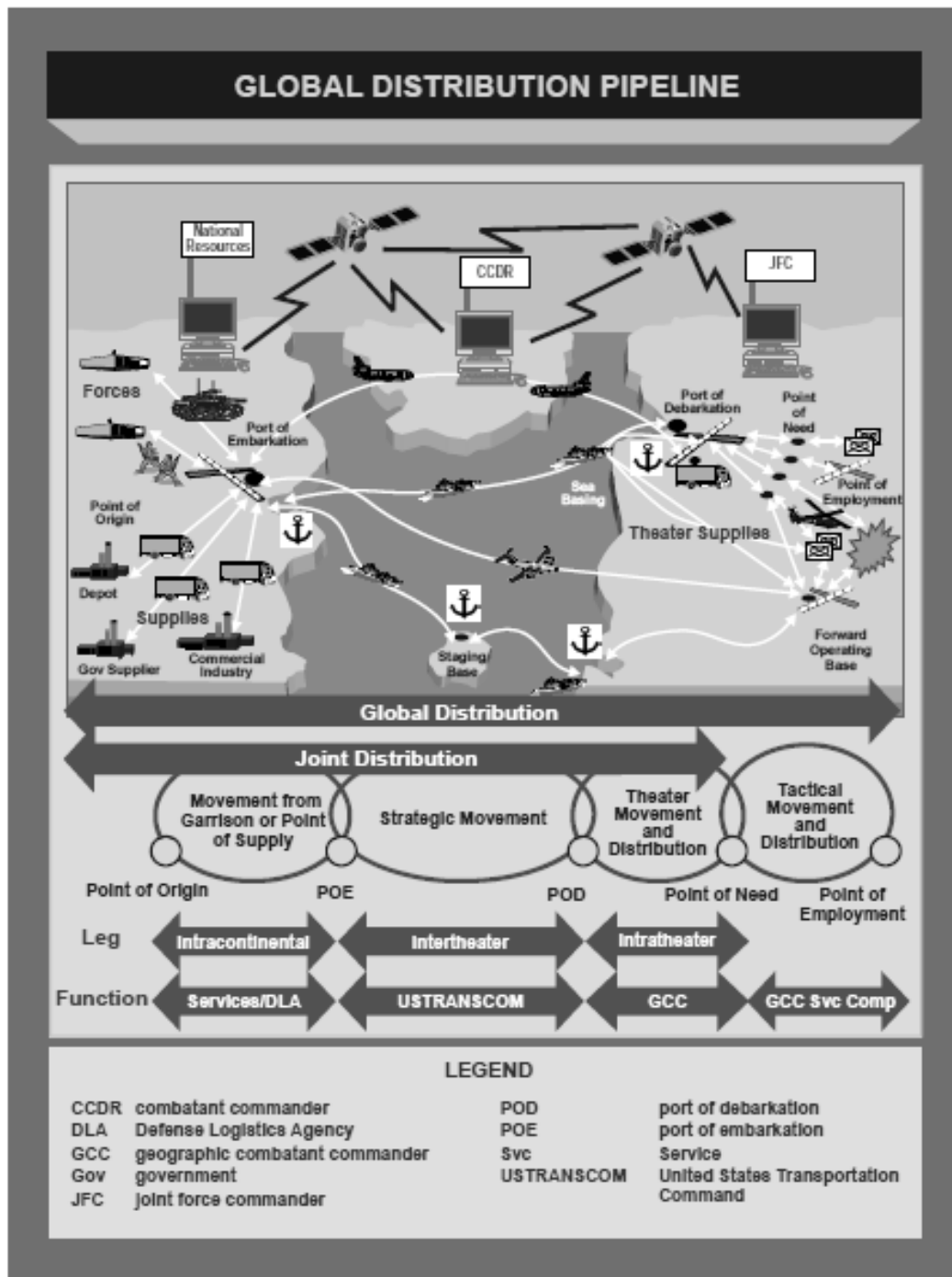


Figure 1 – Global Distribution Pipeline

This paper is organized into four parts: part 1 is dedicated to the evolution of joint distribution from 1989 to 2003, focusing on evolution of the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) and early impacts of OEF; part 2 is dedicated to the time period from 2003 through 2007, focusing on the development of U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) as the Distribution Process Owner, and how the national partners operated in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR); part 3 covers the time period from 2008 to the present, highlighting the partnerships between USCENTCOM, USTRANSCOM, and DLA; part 4 is a discussion of emerging concepts that are likely to drive additional change to joint distribution.

While the deployment process and execution are critical components, this paper will focus on the distribution of sustainment material from the strategic base, primarily the continental US, through the operational level of logistics, to tactical organizations in the Coalition/Joint Operations Area – Afghanistan (CJOA-A). Joint distribution is defined as:

The operational process of synchronizing all elements of the joint logistics system using the Joint Deployment and Distribution Enterprise for end-to-end movement of forces and material from point of origin to designated point of need.²

Part 1: 1989 – 2003

Apart from the military services, the dominant players in the joint distribution system at the strategic level are DLA and USTRANSCOM. DLA operations, as depicted in figure 1, resulted from the 1989 Defense Management Report Decision (DMRD) 902, which directed DLA to take control of the military services' wholesale depot systems and consolidate as much as possible in order to gain efficiencies across the Department.³ Designed to save money by combining similar capabilities originally

established separately by DLA and the services, DMRD 902 also created a cost-saving culture, while simultaneously generating increased accountability to the military services. Today, professionals at DLA attribute the decision to consolidate depots and the resulting collaboration with the military services as the basis of substantive improvements in the 1990's and 2000's.⁴

Shortly after the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) published DMRD 902, Iraq invaded Kuwait. Despite the tremendous victory by the American-led coalition in DESERT STORM, American logisticians discovered a number of critical weaknesses in the supply sustainment system. Military logisticians documented several issues, highlighting problems associated with in-transit visibility, reception, and frustrated cargo. Unfortunately for the Department of Defense (DoD), the distribution system was not sufficiently developed to adapt quickly and apply solutions to the identified problems. After DESERT STORM however, the simultaneous challenge to meet DoD requirements for efficiency and cost savings, coupled with increasing demand for better customer service to the military services, prompted a number of initiatives.⁵

In order to meet the worldwide demand for common supplies, DLA established in the mid-1990's two Strategic Distribution Platforms, one on each coast of the Continental United States. These facilities stocked, stored, and issued common-user supply items on a geographical basis. The facility in New Cumberland, Pennsylvania was responsible for the eastern half of the Continental United States, eastern South America, the USEUCOM, and USCENTCOM areas of responsibility. DLA established the second strategic distribution platform in San Joaquin, California that covered the rest of the globe.⁶

In order to account for vendor and service-provided material, DLA also developed Container Consolidation Points at each strategic distribution platform, allowing the military services to consolidate material with DLA's stored material and reduce the number of total containers shipped to the customer. Additionally, DLA formed a number of "co-located" facilities; designed to support specific, service-owned maintenance and supply depots. As an example, DLA established a facility in Anniston, Alabama that provided material and spares for the Army's tracked-vehicle maintenance program.⁷ The innovations resulted in a higher level of service to customers in the Continental United States.

The Army, upon giving up depot-level supply functions in the early 1990's, began to apply pressure to improve service to OCONUS customers. Long delivery times from U.S.-based DLA depots caused the Army to either hold excessive levels of retail stock in theater, or to order required material at higher than expected priorities, resulting in higher air-delivery costs. In response to those issues, DLA established distribution centers in critical locations around the world, providing a closer-to-need storage and issue capability to address order-to-delivery timelines. DLA also instituted a system of replenishment to the OCONUS distribution centers that relied on lower-cost surface shipping. The result was better customer response at considerably lower cost.⁸

As a direct result of DRMD 902, DLA had changed dramatically in the years between DESERT STORM and IRAQI FREEDOM. In addition to the evolution already noted, DLA reduced its number of employees from over 26,000 to fewer than 10,000; established 8 overseas distribution centers; and reduced its storage capability by over 588 Million cubic feet.⁹

The September 11, 2001 attacks on the U.S. homeland triggered U.S. and coalition combat operations in Afghanistan. Within a month of the attack, U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF), along with Afghan Northern Alliance Troops, were fighting against Taliban and al Qaeda forces in Northern Afghanistan. Coalition forces defeated Taliban fighters in successive battles, culminating with Operation ANACONDA in March 2002.¹⁰

Distribution for the early period of the war was largely ad hoc, reflecting the nature of the tactical deployment to that point in the war. CENTCOM deliberately delayed deployment of logistics assets in order to build combat capability in Afghanistan more quickly.¹¹ In order to cope with inadequate logistics structure, logisticians applied a number of non-standard practices. As an example, the 21st Theater Sustainment Command (TSC), in Kaiserslautern Germany, communicated directly with SOF in Afghanistan via satellite telephone. The 21st TSC coordinated supply drops from C-130 and C-17 aircraft to meet the relatively small SOF supply requirements.¹² The larger troop formations, centered around Bagram in the east, and Kandahar in the south, required more robust support.

By March 2002, USCENTCOM, USTRANSCOM, and the Army struggled to provide sustainment to CTF Mountain, a Brigade Combat Team (BCT) from 10th Mountain Division, in the Bagram area, and to TF Rakkasan, a BCT from 101st Airborne Division, in the Kandahar area.¹³ USTRANSCOM did not have enough strategic airlift assets to support airfields at Bagram and Kandahar from distant airfields in Europe and the U.S.¹⁴ USTRANSCOM deployed assets and created air hubs in Karshi Khanabad (K2), Uzbekistan; Al Udeid, Qatar; and Manas, Kyrgyzstan in order to distribute material

to Bagram and Kandahar via smaller tactical aircraft such as the C-130. USMC and SOF elements also deployed to Jacobabad and Shahbaz, Pakistan to provide additional support to air and SOF forces in Afghanistan.¹⁵

USCENTCOM and USTRANSCOM had effectively surrounded Afghanistan with support elements, distributing material to Afghanistan from Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Qatar. USCENTCOM logisticians executed most resupply via air, but also developed limited ground resupply as well. USCENTCOM contracted host-nation trucking from K2 and Jacobabad to supplement air shipments. Contracting officers also employed host-nation trucking within Afghanistan, but with limited success.¹⁶

In May 2002, U.S. Forces transitioned from combat operations to security assistance operations. As part of the transition, XVIII Airborne Corps Headquarters deployed to Bagram Airfield and stood-up CJTF-180. In addition to providing command and control for security assistance units throughout Northeast Afghanistan, CJTF 180 also designated the 1st Corps Support Command (COSCOM) in Uzbekistan as the Joint Logistics Command (JLC) in June 2002.¹⁷ The JLC was the CJTF-180 synchronization agent for coalition logistics in Afghanistan.¹⁸ In late 2002, USTRANSCOM opened the ground line of communications (GLOC) to Afghanistan, via Karachi, Pakistan.¹⁹ The so-called PAKGLOC became the primary strategic resupply route to Afghanistan, accounting for over 80 percent of all sustainment cargo to Afghanistan.²⁰ The distribution construct developed by the JLC remained in place for the next five years.²¹

In August 2002, Pres. George W. Bush directed the Joint Staff and USCENTCOM to begin the build-up in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates for an attack into Iraq.²² As a function of that build-up, the Army deployed the

377th Theater Sustainment Command (TSC), which assumed overall direction of theater-level logistics support for Afghanistan, as well as the planning for upcoming operations in Iraq. Kuwait had become the logistics hub for all operations in the USCENTCOM AOR.

With OIF barely a few months old, USCENTCOM found itself overwhelmed in the theater logistics area just beyond the air and sea ports of debarkation in Kuwait.²³ The Army Science Board found significant deficiencies in distribution management functions at the operational level, resulting in substandard logistics command and control. The result was overflowing storage yards at the air and sea ports, insufficient capability for onward movement, and an almost complete loss of in-transit visibility of the sustainment cargo moving through Kuwait to ultimate destinations in Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁴

These conditions drove USTRANSCOM, the Army Materiel Command, and DLA to establish a partnership to develop, deploy and employ the CENTCOM Deployment and Distribution Operations Center (CDDOC). Its function was to bridge the gap between the strategic and operational levels of logistics in support of the Combatant Commander. While the CDDOC was under the operational control (OPCON) of USCENTCOM, through the CENTCOM J4, virtually all of the original sixty-four members came from USTRANSCOM and DLA.²⁵ The national distribution partners were clearly pushing capability forward into the operational level of logistics.²⁶

The team set up quickly and generated immediate improvement in the areas of in-transit visibility, locating and expediting frustrated high priority cargo, and prioritizing intra-theater air distribution.²⁷ Aside from the significant improvements to physical distribution, the CDDOC filled the previously identified gap in distribution command and

control (C2). By virtue of combining the powerful reach-back capability of the national partners while OPCON to the Combatant Commander, the CDDOC added clarity to the distribution C2 structure at the theater strategic level.²⁸ The CDDOC, established as a 100-day pilot program, was such a success that the Joint Staff subsequently codified the concept into joint doctrine as the Joint Deployment and Distribution Operations Center (JDDOC). Thus, Joint Publication 4-09 describes the JDDOC as “the GCC’s staff element that coordinates, synchronizes, and optimizes strategic and theater deployment and distribution operations within the GCC’s AOR.”²⁹ JDDOCs now exist in each of the Geographic Combatant Commands (GCC).

Part 2: 2003 – 2007

Similarly to DLA, USTRANSCOM also traces its evolution over the last several years to a single, watershed decision. In September 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld signed a directive that made USTRANSCOM the Distribution Process Owner (DPO).³⁰ Secretary Rumsfeld subsequently restated and expanded the authorities in May 2006.³¹ The DPO designation gave USTRANSCOM broad responsibilities to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of joint distribution.

The new authority expanded the traditional USTRANSCOM strategic view of port-to-port transportation to end-to-end distribution.³² While the charter provided authority to act, USTRANSCOM did not assume ownership or any other changes to existing command relationships. The new authorities did, however, provide the spark to generate significant change to the strategic distribution landscape.

Among USTRANSCOM’s first priorities was the expansion of its mission to an end-to-end perspective. This expansion was a significant leap for a command that had

focused its entire existence on purely transportation functions. The expansion of USTRANSCOM responsibility to include supply-chain segments previous to the Port of Embarkation, or beyond the Port of Debarkation, represented expertise outside of its traditional skill sets. Figure 2, extracted from the USTRANSCOM DPO overview brief, depicts the DPO challenge to impact supply-chain segments well outside its direct control.³³

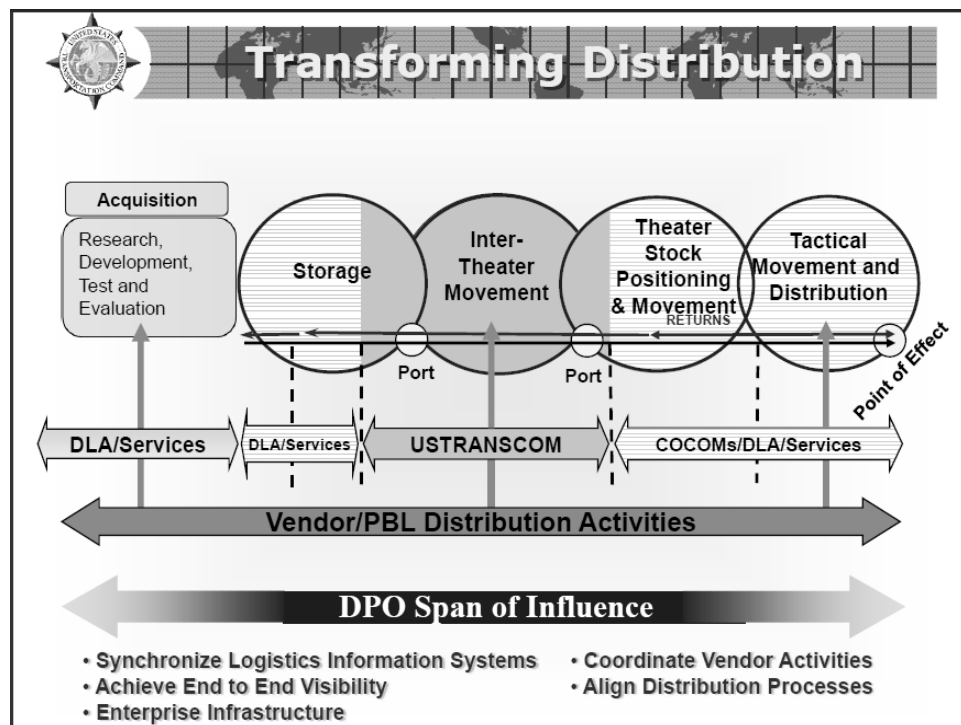


Figure 2 – DPO span of influence

The effort to reconcile pre-DPO capabilities with the responsibilities of the DPO designation led USTRANSCOM to partner with the Joint Staff to develop the Joint Deployment and Distribution Enterprise concept and generate new doctrine with Joint Publication JP 4-09. The JDDE is defined as “the complex of equipment, procedures, doctrine, leaders, technical connectivity, information, shared knowledge, organizations, facilities, training, and materiel needed to conduct joint distribution operations.”³⁴ The

definition recognizes an environment that spans the missions of many organizations. The DPO designation requires USTRANSCOM to influence and synchronize the whole of the JDDE, while only directly controlling about one third of the enterprise.

USTRANSCOM thus turned to strategic partnership as a strategy to fulfill its DPO mandates.³⁵ As USTRANSCOM leaders implemented the JDDE concept, they successfully partnered with the newly-created “community of interest” to generate a host of new initiatives designed to improve distribution performance and efficiency. Under this new construct, USTRANSCOM developed new capabilities such as Joint Task Force – Port Opening (JTF-PO); improved asset and tracking visibility; and commercial partnerships such as the Defense Transportation Coordination Initiative.³⁶

The most important strategic partnership within the JDDE may well be that of USTRANSCOM and DLA. The connection of the two organizations was the first successful attempt to integrate strategic supply and transportation functions. The collaboration quickly increased effectiveness. In the spring and summer of 2003, the Army-run Theater Distribution Center (TDC) in Kuwait was overwhelmed with cargo that had been shipped from the DLA Strategic Distribution Platform in New Cumberland, Pennsylvania. The TDC was unable to receive, segregate and distribute material quickly enough to accommodate the volume.

USTRANSCOM and DLA collaborated to change the business practices associated with stuffing and shipping of containers that were bound for units in Iraq. By establishing shipping lanes in the warehouse based on ordering unit, instead of broadly-defined geographical locations, DLA was able to stuff “pure” unit containers. USTRANSCOM could then bypass the TDC in Kuwait and deliver directly to units in

Iraq.³⁷ While this practice did sacrifice some efficiency in terms of fully-stuffed containers, the process dramatically improved effectiveness through direct delivery. In 2005, DLA further established a Theater Consolidation and Shipping Point (TCSP) in Kuwait, which allowed the CONUS shipping activities to stuff “mixed” containers, ship them to the DLA TCSP in Kuwait for deconsolidation, and onward movement on pure pallets.³⁸ Moreover, USTRANSCOM and DLA launched several, additional initiatives in the CENTCOM AOR to improve the linkage between strategic and operational logistics.

As follow-on to previously identified stock-positioning strategy, DLA established the Defense Distribution Center in Kuwait City (DDKS) in 2005.³⁹ The simple act of stocking material in the CENTCOM AOR, and replenishing that stock via strategic surface shipping, saved over \$6 million annually in air distribution costs.⁴⁰

As DDKS matured, DLA proposed to stock Army-owned material on its behalf, thus relieving the Army of the wholesale supply mission in Kuwait.⁴¹ When the Army closed the Kuwait-based supply warehouse, DDKS had effectively relieved the Army of the responsibility of wholesale stocking of 22,500 separate items.⁴² The warehouse closure freed the Army to transition the wholesale facility into a retrograde and sort operation.⁴³ DLA’s initiative, called AJ2 after the newly-created routing identifier code (RIC), was a significant achievement as the Army was able to divert resources that had been devoted to distribution, and direct them to other, critical support tasks.

DLA expanded the concept to consolidate distribution functions in 2007 when it took over the Navy’s physical distribution functions at the Material Processing Center at Naval Support Activity – Bahrain.⁴⁴ Once again, DLA had consolidated a redundant military service function.

Part 3: 2008 - Present

The establishment of DDKS also provided new opportunities for collaboration and partnership within the CENTCOM AOR. “Tender express” is one example of an almost-accidental program. By 2008, DDKS had become the dominant intra-theater shipper, providing sustainment supply support to military customers in Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan. As a function of that activity, DDKS prepared 2000-3000 air pallets for shipping each month. Intra-theater air is a constrained pipeline; air pallets often waited several days or even weeks for delivery. DDKS shipping managers discovered that commercial aircraft carrying U.S. major end items to Iraq were often only half full. DDKS asked CDDOC to consider commercial air for sustainment cargo bound for Iraq.⁴⁵

The CDDOC coordinated with Air Mobility Division (AMD) within CENTCOM’s Air Component Command. The AMD confirmed that opportune lift was indeed available via a tender system, which allowed AMD to offer cargo to any of seven commercial air carriers that sometimes had space available to destinations in Iraq, such as Bagdad International Airport (BIAP) and Balad. The only remaining issue was the automated tasking system. The AMD system tracked and tendered cargo at airfields only. Air Mobility Command then took the extraordinary step to classify DDKS as an airfield within their air tasking system, even though DDKS is miles from the nearest airport. DDKS could then offer eligible cargo through the AMD tasking system.⁴⁶

Once accepted, the selected carrier picked up the pallet from DDKS within twenty-four hours and flew the pallets from Kuwait International Airport to unit locations in Iraq. DDKS gradually increased the number of air pallets made available. Tender

express eventually took over four-hundred air pallets a week out of the military airlift pipeline.⁴⁷ The cost savings in military manpower and direct airlift costs was nearly \$1 million per month.⁴⁸

As the DPO initiatives continued to succeed and provide critical sustainment to combat units, CENTCOM increasingly requested more complex support. Since mid-2002, USTRANSCOM delivered almost all of the sustainment material for troops in Afghanistan along a strategic surface route through Pakistan. The volume was immense, constituting nearly 50,000 containers per year. Given the political instability, the weather, and the Taliban insurgents in the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA), CENTCOM expressed concern with the increasing risk associated with moving 80 percent of the CJOA-A material on a single route.⁴⁹ In 2008, Maj. Gen. Ken Dowd, USCENTCOM J4, asked USTRANSCOM to open an alternate strategic surface route into Afghanistan in support of OEF.⁵⁰ USTRANSCOM partnered with CENTCOM, DLA, and Department of State to develop a route through Europe, the Caucasus, and the Central Asian States into Northern Afghanistan. While the concept was not new, no material had been delivered from the north since early 2002.

The alternate route was called the Northern Distribution Network (NDN). Opening the NDN was months in the making, with negotiations required with each country transited, detailed cargo accountability, and conformity with national caveats. DLA was a critical player as they provided most of the cargo, developed the required shipping documents, and ensured compliance with a complex web of new regulations imposed by Central Asian States.⁵¹ In addition to negotiations with Ministries of Commerce and Transportation across the proposed route, USTRANSCOM was also

engaged with its commercial shipping partners, Maersk Lines Limited and American Presidents Lines (APL), to execute new contracts to operate the reopened route.⁵²

The collaborative process yielded a viable distribution route that now accounts for over 50 percent of the sustainment cargo entering Afghanistan. Perhaps as important as lowering the overall risk to the military supply chain was the engagement opportunity for USCENTCOM and USTRANSCOM with Afghanistan's northern neighbors. The success in opening the NDN provided a significant economic boost to several Central Asian States, and represents a powerful engagement tool for the Combatant Commander.⁵³

As OIF became the "long war," and the U.S. spent over \$8 billion each month to sustain OIF and OEF, pressure mounted to improve efficiency further in distribution operations.⁵⁴ USTRANSCOM and DLA again partnered to find efficiencies without sacrificing effectiveness. The organizations thus developed DPO Strategic Opportunities (DSO) to apply an end-to-end analysis to the problem of efficiency. The partnership yielded several initiatives. In coordination with USCENTCOM, DLA consolidated cargo bound for multiple destinations in Iraq into single containers. These containers were subsequently deconsolidated and further distributed on host-nation trucks to Supply Support Activities (SSA) in Iraq. The effort improved utilization of containers with no loss in effectiveness.⁵⁵ The DSO team also focused on methods to improve efficiency in air movement to USCENTCOM. Through a few, simple changes to warehouse methods for building air pallets, DLA and USTRANSCOM increased the size and density of air pallets, thereby reducing the total number of pallets built. Ultimately, such a process reduced the number of airlift sorties flown, without sacrificing

overall performance.⁵⁶ While not yet confirmed, the DSO charter has projected nearly \$700 million annual savings. As the relationship matures, DLA and USTRANSCOM increasingly blur the lines between strategic supply and transportation functions.

USTRANSCOM, DLA, and USCENTCOM continue to create solutions to difficult distribution problems in the USCENTCOM AOR. Together, they have fundamentally changed distribution operations at the operational level of logistics. Some of those initiatives have once again blended the lines between levels of war, carrying the national distribution partners beyond the operational level and into the tactical. In some cases, DLA operates directly in the Joint Task Force Commander's Area of Operations.

Also in 2008, the U.S. dramatically increased its commitment to OEF, with troop increases from approximately 30,000 to close to 98,000.⁵⁷ The additional manning added significant challenge to the distribution system, for a number of reasons. The increased stress highlighted the extent to which the Coalition/Joint Operations Area – Afghanistan (CJOA-A) represented a different kind of challenge than Iraq. With Kuwait as the theater logistics base, Iraq offered a robust land route that simply was not available for the CJOA-A. The proximity of Kuwait to Iraq also facilitated the theater to leverage already-existing commercial trucking capability to transport material from DDKS to Iraq. Additionally, as described earlier, commercial air tenders were readily available to provide additional air capability into Iraq.

In order to reach the CJOA-A by surface, both CENTCOM and the national partners were forced to use very-long land routes, either through Pakistan or via the newly-opened NDN. The timelines for the journey were significantly longer than for Iraq, sometimes double the length of time.⁵⁸ The extended surface timelines added

significant stress to the air lines of communication (ALOC) as logisticians attempted to cope with a customer base triple the size of previous years. A result was the use of the ALOC to ship things that would historically move via surface.⁵⁹

DLA determined that the major issue was not oft-cited priority abuse, but rather a lack of storage space for such items in theater, causing emergency shortages for mundane commodities. Simply put, the established distribution system was not robust enough to handle the surge in distribution requirements. Further, the air and surface LOCs were at capacity and not easily expanded.

DLA recommended that the Defense Distribution Center (DDC), once again, establish a forward distribution facility in order to relieve stress on the ALOC.⁶⁰ DLA projected that by stocking fewer than 3,000 items, across supply classes II, III(P), IV and IX, they would be able to reduce the weight of sustainment airlift into Afghanistan by 38 percent.⁶¹ DLA advocated the facility as a logical extension of existing stock-positioning policy, but the new supply warehouse also represented an extended, national-partner presence at the tactical level of war. As a result of DLA's recommendation and the subsequent Request for Forces (RFF) from USCENTCOM, DLA deployed its Defense Distribution Expeditionary Depot (DDED) into a combat theater of operations for the first time. The DDED successfully deployed to Kandahar, Afghanistan in July 2010. The DDED subsequently transitioned operations to a government-owned, contractor-operated (GOCO) facility, and redeployed to New Cumberland, Pennsylvania in January 2011.⁶²

Part 4: Emerging initiatives and impacts on the future of distribution.

In addition to the DLA actions in the CJOA-A, the DSO initiatives continue to develop as well. Typically, the partnership between the national partners and USCENTCOM yielded additional effectiveness well beyond organic capability and capacity at theater-strategic and operational levels. DSO is different in that it is focused on efficiency, specifically attempting to improve existing initiatives, thereby conserving enterprise resources, while simultaneously sustaining or improving effectiveness. The DSO now sets its sights on the Northern Distribution Network. USCENTCOM and the National Partners re-opened the NDN to lower risk associated with the surface route through Pakistan, but the U.S. pays nearly twice the cost per container for use of the NDN.⁶³

The two most obvious cost-cutting measures are to maximize the use of 40' shipping containers vice 20' containers, and to consolidate multiple consignees into a single container in order to maximize the available cargo space. Theoretically, two 20' containers carry as much as one 40' container; however, a single 40' container costs twenty-five percent less than two smaller containers.⁶⁴ Presently, 20' containers are the norm as most destinations do not have the capability to handle the larger containers. Additionally, consolidating consignees on the CONUS segment of a shipment requires deconsolidating in theater for delivery to the ultimate consignee, a capability that currently does not exist in the CJOA-A.

The emerging solution is for DLA to establish a Theater (or CJOA-A) Consolidation and Shipping Point (TCSP) in Afghanistan. While the location and timeline for such an initiative are not yet published, DLA expects to execute in 2011.

The TCSP will be the first-ever established inside the combat zone, and will be another example of blurring the lines between the national distribution partners, USCENTCOM, and the tactical distribution network in Afghanistan.⁶⁵

Despite the best efforts of USCENTCOM, USTRANSCOM and DLA, gaps remain in the execution of surface sustainment distribution to units in Afghanistan. Visibility is still a problem both for material enroute along all surface routes to Afghanistan as well as for material moving within Afghanistan.⁶⁶ No organization sees itself as both responsible and capable to provide that visibility for all surface sustainment. In other words, there does not exist a single, controlling entity for surface distribution into and within the CJOA-A. Unlike Iraq, sustainment material moves “unconstrained” within the CJOA-A, and receiving units do not have visibility of inbound cargo. At bases across Afghanistan, sustainment material competes for entry with essential, base-operating services such as fuel, waste management services and personnel moves. Given that the bases can safely admit a finite number of trucks each day, sustainment material often waits days and sometimes weeks for entry and final delivery.⁶⁷

Given the nearly ten years of continuous improvement initiatives implemented by the DPO and DSO partners, why do so many gaps still exist? USTRANSCOM, as the DPO, believes that the issues described above, as well as a host of others surrounding in-transit and asset visibility, delivery and reception capabilities, and even methods of contracting for distribution services, are a function of synchronization. In November 2009, USTRANSCOM requested that the Secretary of Defense modify the Unified Command Plan (UCP) and designate USTRANSCOM as the Global Distribution

Synchronizer.⁶⁸ As the following passage from a USTRANSCOM Point Paper indicates, the proposed designation will:

To proactively overcome growing challenges to projecting and sustaining military power, and to leverage opportunities to extend distribution capabilities, DOD must synchronize distribution planning. . . Within the Campaign Planning framework established in the 2008 Guidance for Employment of the Force (GEF), this would occur through a Global Campaign Plan for Distribution (GCP-D) led by the “Global Distribution Synchronizer.” Designating CDRUSTRANSCOM as the “Global Distribution Synchronizer” will establish a lead combatant command to synchronize distribution planning across the DOD, reducing risk to projecting and sustaining military forces in the face of growing “access” challenges.⁶⁹

Perhaps the most powerful aspect of USTRANSCOM’s request to become the Global Distribution Synchronizer is the requirement to develop a global campaign plan for distribution. The activities surrounding that mission include the requirements to assess the operational environment, detail a strategic approach, identify critical tasks, and identify the appropriate organizations to accomplish those tasks. USTRANSCOM will culminate the process when they publish an Operations Plan (OPLAN), with all the attending annexes and appendices.⁷⁰

The revised UCP language will vest USTRANSCOM with the role of lead planner to develop all of the components of the OPLAN, with all others in the role of support planners. All others includes the military services; Combat Support Agencies, e.g. DLA; and even the Geographic Combatant Commands (GCC). While USCENCOM will continue to be the supported command for OEF and OND, they will support USTRANSCOM in the planning effort for a global distribution campaign plan.⁷¹

The value of a global campaign plan is the ability to synchronize efforts across boundaries of all the GCC’s. USTRANSCOM will also be a forcing function for the disparate group of organizations shown in Figure 2 to close any existing seams in the distribution pipeline. Consider the synergy when commanders, directors, and planning

staffs from across the distribution planning community come together and develop a strategic framework, complete with centers of gravity, lines of effort and operation, courses of action, identified risks, resource requirements, and a timeline to execute, if required. In addition to addressing roles and missions for all actors, the OPLAN will enable the Geographic Combatant Commander to prioritize phase zero engagement with specific countries in his AOR in order to ensure access in the event of a contingency operation.

The risk of such an arrangement is overreach by USTRANSCOM. The global distribution pipeline is complex, with an array of service providers who do not always agree on approach. USTRANSCOM's effort to synchronize in accordance with proposed UCP language is likely to meet with resistance from organizations that will feel a loss of flexibility to carry out assigned missions. To mitigate those concerns, USTRANSCOM is attempting to make clear that they have no designs on any command and control changes. They have even published an outline of vignettes that describe the collaborative nature of their proposed synchronizer role, vice any sort of tasking authority that might be implied.⁷² Regardless of the challenges, if the Secretary of Defense approves the UCP language, and USTRANSCOM is successful in developing a Phase Zero campaign plan that accounts for global distribution requirements, the community will be far more prepared to adapt to combat realities than in 2001.

Conclusions

The results and further implications of DMRD 902 and the DPO designation have completely revolutionized the global distribution pipeline. One can clearly trace a host of impressive initiatives that have sprung from each of those decisions. The distribution

landscape is virtually unrecognizable from its pre-DMRD 902 roots. As an example, any notion in 1991 that DLA would, or could, deploy a depot into a combat zone and establish a forward supply point would have been preposterous. USTRANSCOM and DLA's demonstrated global reach, coupled with the partnerships forged with USCENTCOM, have truly blurred the lines between the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of logistics. While one could argue that the national distribution partners have unnecessarily inserted themselves into the Geographic Combatant Commander's domain, one cannot deny the improved levels of support in terms of both efficiency and effectiveness.

As a result of extended national partner reach, DLA and USTRANSCOM have relieved the military services of the execution of many distribution tasks. The military services, especially the Army and Navy, have leveraged new DLA capabilities and given up millions of square feet of wholesale storage, diverting those resources to other Title 10 responsibilities. Indeed, the military services have maintained their influence on the system through their persistent pressure on the national distribution partners to provide better service. Through their participation in partnerships like DSO, the services have continued to leverage their status as a user of DLA and USTRANSCOM.

Despite the increasing emphasis on strategic partnerships, the truth is that the improvements of the last twenty years have largely resulted from "stovepiped" decisions. As an example, DLA's stock positioning strategy, leveraging strategic distribution platforms and overseas depots, developed independently from USTRANSCOM's strategic routes plans. USTRANSCOM and DLA generate funds via separate, working capital funds that do not respond to the same business stimuli and

incentives. If there is to be a true distribution network, a legitimate *enterprise*, the actors within the joint distribution community must find a way to merge the stovepipes in a systemic way.

There must be recognition across the joint force that strategic supply decisions have impacts on strategic transportation functions, and vice versa. Thus, the proposed UCP language, which designates USTRANSCOM as the Global Distribution Synchronizer, represents the next landmark decision for the joint distribution community. The Global Distribution Synchronizer designation is not an incremental advance in distribution; rather, the responsibilities inherent in the global campaign planning process represent a sea change in the leverage the USTRANSCOM commander can bring to bear in synchronizing distribution effects across the globe. Yogi Berra once said, “when you come to a fork in the road, take it.”⁷³ Now is the time for USTRANSCOM to transform the Joint Distribution Pipeline into a Joint Enterprise. Now is the time for the next, great transformation in joint distribution.

Endnotes

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